ANTIQUARIAN NOTES:

MAINLY OF MEN AND MATTERS

CONNECTED WITH THE

CHURCHES

ON THE ROLL OF THE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

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Oldbury Chapel.

The present parish church, in 1841, superseded an earlier building called Oldbury Chapel, which appears to have been in Presbyterian hands before the Act of Uniformity (1662), and for many years they were left in undisturbed possession. It was built by subscription in 1529, and licensed, but not consecrated, by Jerome de Ghinucciis, Bishop of Worcester, an Italian, who was afterwards deprived of his see, by Act of Parliament, for non-residence. This Chapel, with certain adjoining properties, still in the possession of the Unitarian congregation, was surrendered in the court of the lord of the manor in 1659, and this is the beginning of its written history. Subsequent surrenders took place at each renewal of the body of trustees. Dr. Nash, the historian of Worcestershire, says of Bishop Lloyd, one of the seven bishops committed to the Tower by James II., and who occupied the see from 1699 to 1717, that

he ousted the dissenters from this Chapel, and notwithstanding the pretence of its being on copyhold ground, consecrated both Chapel and burial ground. The present building, in which the Unitarian congregation worships, is the successor of the earlier one erected on land given in 1708 as a substitute for the Chapel from which the congregation had been ejected. A small portion of the original fabric of 1708 yet remains, and the Communion Table and lectern are made of the oak used in its seats.

To the building of Bishop Ghinucciis there are references in two letters written by Sir John Wyrley to Lord Keeper Bridgeman, and preserved amongst the State Papers. Under date of the 13th September, 1667, he says:—

> *I have received papers from your lordship about a conventicle, or seditious meeting at Oldbury, co. Salop, held by — Frazer and his accomplices; I have waited on Sir Rob. Holt, Warwickshire, upon the place, and he promised assistance to discover and punish the offenders, as do other honest gentlemen near. I hope, as justice of peace, by pursuing your lordship's most useful instructions, to prevent any attempting the like boldness there.*

Writing further, on the 17th September, 1667, from Walsall, Sir John Wyrley and J. Vernon say to Bridgeman:—

> *There are several conjectures as to the number of*

persons who were assembled. Some came as lookers on; some as delighted with novelty; some as conventiclers; these last were disappointed, expecting a different opinion and discourse to that they had. We cannot discover any inclination towards disturbance, though the preacher's rambling discourse savoured of it, and may draw a suspicion that many more were of his mind. We will acquaint Lord Windsor with their proceedings.

Enclosure :—

Examination of Rob. Girdler, sen. and jr.; of Wm. Ebb, and two others of Walsall, and of Rich. Fisher, sen. and jun.; and Henry Free, sen. and junr., of West Bromwich.

They were at Oldbury Chapel, Shropshire, Sept. 1st, in the afternoon, the assembly being variously stated at from 300 to 1000, some of whom stood outside, the chapel being so full. The preacher, supposed to be one — Worden, preached from "Thy kingdom come"; exhorting the saints to pray for the coming of Christ in glory, to reward all working and suffering saints. Lord Windsor's soldiers came, and attempted to take him, but he slipped away and escaped among the crowd. He passed through B'ham the beginning of the next week, and said that he was ordained by a bishop, and preached on his authority. Sep. 14, 15, & 17, 1667.*

The Shropshire Parish Register Society, in its recent volume—Nonconformist Registers—includes the interesting register of births and baptisms belonging to the

* Query: Richard Moreton, M.D., ejected from Kinver.

congregation of the "Old Dissenting Chapel, Oldbury." It opens in 1715, with *Children baptized by Jn. Peach in and about Oldbury.*

Extracts from Diaries and Letters of Professor David Lewis Evans.

No. 2.

(Continued from p. 149).

Some references to the "Quarterly" Meetings of the Welsh Unitarian ministers are of interest:—

10th April, 1849. Left Bridgend at 12 o'clock, walked to Aberavan, went by omnibus to Neath, left for Pontardawe.

11th. Walked to Onenfawr, rested 3 hours at John Michael's house. Proceeded to the Meeting. Mr. Peter Joseph introduced. Mr. Rees Davies, of Pen-y-bryn, Cardiganshire, preached from Hebr. x. 12, 13. [But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.] *The sentiments were good, but the preacher rambled much: in his prayer he preached a little and said "a wyddoch chwi,*" an expression which Mr.*

* English, "Do you know?"

Davies uses quite unawares to himself. Slept that evening at Mr. Griffiths, the minister's lodging.

12th. Mr. Thomas Thomas introduced. Mr. Owen Evans preached, text, "Myfi yw'r ffordd, y gwirionedd, a'r bywyd," &c., a good sermon. On the conference Mr. Davies, Mr. Titus Evans, Mr. Jones of Bridgend, and Mr. James spoke on the pwnc "Natur a Diben Cosp." Dined at Mrs. Jones's, at the Red Cow, with the ministers.

13th. Walked to Neath, from there to Cwmbychan.

14th. By mail to Bridgend.

15th. Preached at the Old Chapel.

27th June, 1849. Rode in Jones's car from Bridgend to Neath. Walked from Neath to Rev. John James's against dinner. Went to chapel at 3 o'clock. Mr. J. E. Jones introduced with his usually long prayers. Mr. Peter Joseph preached, text, Gal. vi. 7. [Be not deceived; God is not mocked], *and Mr. D. Lloyd, text, St. John xiv. 9* [Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?] *Two rambling, bungling sermons, with a few good sentiments here and there. Slept at Vardre, Mr. James's house.*

28th. Went to chapel against 10 o'clock. Introduced; read Ps. 37, St. Luke 6, a short prayer. Mr. Thos. Williams of Pantydefaid preached from St. John

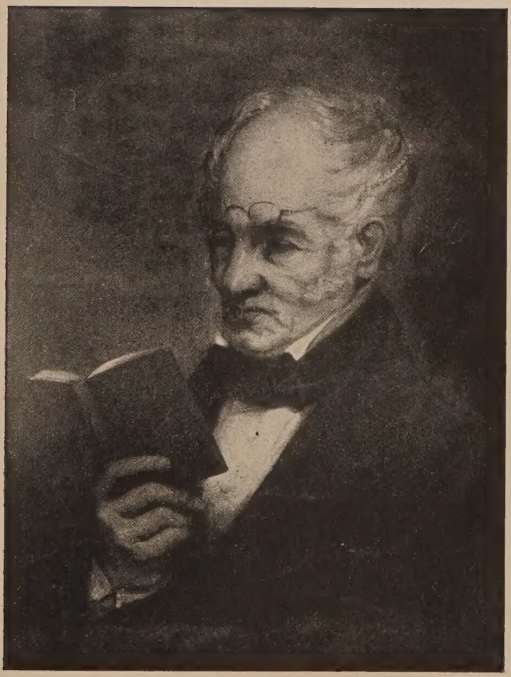
xiv. 8. The paternity of God; a good well studied sermon, well delivered. The subject of conference was "Religion." Mr. Davies of Capelgroes, Mr. O. Evans, Mr. J. E. Jones, Mr. Lloyd, and Mr. James spoke. The next quarterly meeting to be at Swansea, and the next annual meeting to be held at Pantydefaid. I rode that night to Swansea, after hearing the sermon preached by Mr. Owen Evans, at Vardre.

3rd October, 1849. In school in the morning; gave holidays in the afternoon till Friday morning. Went to Swansea in the omnibus, against the quarterly meeting.

4th. Went to Meeting. Introduced. Mr. Owen Evans preached, &c. For an account of the meeting see "Ymofynydd."

William Marshall.

The original portrait in oils, of which a photograph is here given, was brought to light by means of the request from Mr. Richard Heape, which appeared in ANTIQUARIAN NOTES, p. 178. Through the kind offices of the Vicar of Walford-on-Wye, and his brother, Mr. Alfred Bache, the portrait was traced, and by permission of Mr. Wm. Bailey Marshall, a copy has been secured by Mr. Heape for the vestry of Blackwater Street Church, Rochdale, to which congregation the Rev. Wm. Marshall ministered from 1806 to 1810.



WILLIAM MARSHALL.

North Shields: Presbyterian Chapel.

Some interesting facts, not generally known, about this congregation are to be found in its baptismal register, which covers the period 1756 to 1812.

In it the Rev. Wm. Turner, M.A., makes entry on the 22nd February, 1837, when sending it to the Commissioners:—

> *Dissolved about 1813, and register kept since 1822 by W. T.*

The Rev. *Joseph Wilkinson* enters from 6th June, 1756, to 13th November, 1762. Can this be the minister of the same name who was minister of the Old Meeting, Birmingham, and of Oldbury Chapel, and resigned in 1756? Wreford, in his Presbyterian Nonconformity, Birmingham, says* that he relinquished his pastoral duties in consequence of ill-health, and engaged in the pursuits of commerce, residing in Birmingham. He died in September, 1780. Possibly he may have tried a lighter scene of labour, ere finally retiring from active ministry.

The Rev. John Dean accepted an Invitation from the principal members of the Protestant Dissenting Congregation

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* P. 34.

of North Shields, the 27th March, 1763. He enters until the 17th June, 1768. He then became minister of Toad Lane Chapel, Bradford, where he makes his first entry in its register on the 14th August following.

The Rev. Isaac Robinson settled at North Shields, 23rd August, 1768, as pastor, and enters until 12th July, 1782.

James McConochie settled 15th Dec., 1782; his last entry being on the 8th May, 1785.

> *Ann, dau. Rev. Jas. McConochie, and Margt. his wife, being 1 day old, bap. by Rev. Adam Laidlaw, 1 May, 1783.*
>
> *Mary, dau. — do. — bap. 8th March, 1784, by same.*

George Smith accepted invitation on 27th July, 1785, and settled at North Shields on 16th October, 1785. The last entry of his is on the 11th January, 1789. He was at Monton from 1779 until moving here. He afterwards conformed.

Samuel Girle settled at N./S. 23rd February, 1789, and enters until 19th September, 1794.

> *Susanna, dau. Samuel Girle, of parish and township of Tynemouth, and Ann his wife, bap. by her father, 9th Augt., 1792; b. 28th June.*
>
> *Bridget Bradby, dau. — do. — bap. 27 Jan., 1794, by her father; b. 21 Dec., 1793.*

He removed to Lancaster, and died in 1813.

Samuel Pollock accepted 18th Jan., 1795, and made the last entry in this register on the 3rd March, 1812.

If to these particulars be added the reference given in Dr. John Evans's MSS., 1714—1729, we get a fair idea of the ministers of this congregation :—

> *North-Shealls, near Newcastle. John Turnbull, dead 1723. Cowden. 300 [hearers], 8 [county voters]. 1 Justice, 5 or 6 of good estates, raised 100 men in the late rebellion.*

John Turnbull ...	...	dead, 1723
— Cowden ...	...	
Joseph Wilkinson	...	1756 — 1762
John Dean ...	...	1763 — 1768
Isaac Robinson ...	...	1768 — 1782
James McConochie	...	1782 — 1785
George Smith ...	...	1785 — 1789
Samuel Girle ...	...	1789 — 1794
Samuel Pollock ...	...	1795 — 1812

John Milton and Vallombrosa.

> "He sang of Adam's Paradise and smiled,
> Remembering Vallombrosa. Therefore is
> The place divine to English man and child,
> And pilgrims leave their soul here in a kiss."
>
> E. B. Browning.

Vallombrosa! The sonorous Italian name is so closely associated in British minds with the memory of John Milton, that I trust the ensuing short account

of a visit recently paid to the far-famed Tuscan convent and forest may not be deemed superfluous.

Leaving Florence by an early train on a warm sunny morning during the last week of April, we reached the station of Sant 'Ellero, on the Florence-Rome railway, a pretty spot close to the Arno, where the nightingales were singing lustily in the poplar thickets. Entering here a little mountain railway-train, in ascending we quickly exchanged the fertile lands of the valley of the Arno, where the roses and acacias were in full bloom, for large tracts covered with woods of Spanish chestnut just bursting into leaf, and these later gave place to a bare, bleak, stony mountain-side. The line ended at Saltino (4000 feet above sea-level), where there has of recent years sprung up a small summer resort consisting of a few villas and hotels, one of which we noticed bore the name of our illustrious poet. From Saltino, a mile of walking in the crisp cold air on a pine-shaded road brought us to the great convent of Vallombrosa, an imposing grey pile, crowned by two ancient towers and splendidly situated in the hollow of a vast natural amphitheatre of forest.

> "Overhead up-grew
> Insuperable height of loftiest shade
> Cedar and pine, and fir and branching palm;
> A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend
> Shade above shade, a woody theatre
> Of stateliest view."—*Paradise Lost*, iv., c. 131.

Substitute "beech" for "palm" in these noble lines,

and you have a complete word-picture of the setting of the great Abbey of Vallombrosa.

Founded as a Benedictine home by the holy hermit Giovanni Gualberto early in the eleventh century, Vallombrosa rapidly grew famous, influential, and even independent during the times of the Countess Matilda of Tuscany and of the great Pope Gregory VII. (Hildebrand), both of whom frequently resided here; nor did this abbey cease to be rich and powerful until its suppression in modern times. Now, the vast buildings, which were greatly altered by the Abbot Averardo Niccolini in the seventeenth century, shortly before Milton's visit to Italy, are used as a school of forestry by the Government, whilst only three Benedictine monks are allowed to remain here to perform the necessary services in the gaudy rococo church, which has long been despoiled of its many pictures and treasures of art.

But it is rather the natural and unchanged surroundings of the place itself that attract us. Here in the keen mountain air, so refreshing after the relaxing heat of Florence, we find the neighbouring meadows gay with primroses and white wood-anemones, recalling to us a northern springtide; whilst from all sides there strikes on the ear the plash of many torrents that find their way down from the snows far above, to fall into

the deep fish-pond of the abbey. We ascend through the sweet-scented woods by means of steep stone-hewn medieval pathways of the "Paredisino"—the founder's hermitage that is now a ruin—perched upon an overhanging cliff, whence we look down upon one of the most wonderful and historic views to be found throughout the whole of Italy. All around us are tall, dark pines, for we are truly

> "In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades
> High over-arched embower;"—

immediately below us are spread the broad roofs of the stately old abbey that in former days gave seven popes to the throne of St. Peter; beyond the woods we see extended the rich valley of the Arno, and far away in the distance we perceive Florence itself with Brunelleschi's gigantic dome and Giotto's graceful tower clearly visible to the naked eye. As we sit gazing at this noble prospect, we remember that Milton's Puritanism was, in the truest sense of the word, catholic; so that we can never doubt for an instant but that his great mind, teeming with half-developed ideas for his unwritten epic, found a pure delight in this exquisite retreat, and drew no little inspiration from its glorious associations.

HERBERT M. VAUGHAN.

END OF THIRD VOLUME.

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